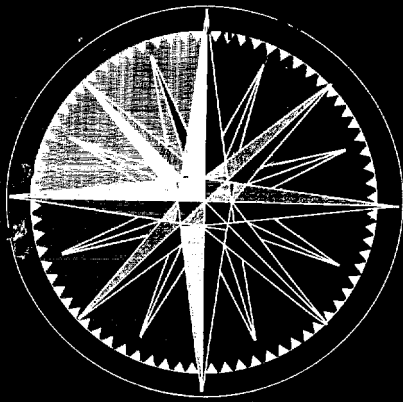


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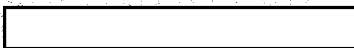
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# SPECIAL REPORT

IMPLICATIONS OF FRENCH MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS THIS MONTH

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
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**IMPLICATIONS OF FRENCH MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS THIS MONTH**

The nationwide municipal elections in France scheduled for 14 and 21 March are expected to point up the failure of the Gaullist Union for the New Republic (UNR) to develop a grass-roots organization. They will also illustrate the political disorganization of the traditional parties at the national level. It seems unlikely that the recently revised municipal electoral law will produce the clear-cut polarization of political forces and consequent attraction of the anti-Communist vote the Gaullists hoped for. Local issues and personalities appear to be taking greater precedence over political ideology than formerly, and the resulting hodgepodge of pragmatic alliances is defying efforts to discern a national pattern. While the results of these elections will have only a limited bearing on the presidential contest this fall, when De Gaulle or a hand-picked candidate is expected to win, they will probably confirm a precarious future for the Gaullists without De Gaulle.

New Municipal Election Law

Municipal elections to replace local councils throughout France are held every six years on two consecutive Sundays, the second of which is for a runoff in those districts where no party received a majority. The approach of this year's elections highlights the anomalous position of the UNR, which dominates Parliament but has yet to establish itself at the local level. Its revision of the municipal electoral law is an attempt to offset the weakness resulting from its inability to build up a national political machine.

The Gaullists forced the law through Parliament last June. By prohibiting regrouping

for the runoff, it obliges parties in all cities of over 30,000 population to make their alliances definitive and formal for the first ballot. In place of the pragmatic ad hoc second-ballot arrangements between the Socialist Party (SFIO) and the Communist Party (PCF) practiced in the 1964 cantonal and 1962 National Assembly elections, for example, the Socialists would have to conclude formal pre-election alliances with the Communists if they wished to cooperate with them at all. The Gaullists hoped that the Socialists, by forming such alliances with the Communists, would alienate the center parties, some of whose elements would then rally to the UNR as the only viable anti-Communist political formation.

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The Gaullists see in such polarization the best chance for increasing the strength of the UNR and assuring its survival in the post - De Gaulle era.

There is some evidence of the partisan nature of the reform in special redistricting provisions for the cities of Marseille and Lyon. Socialist Mayor Defferre's third district in Marseille was gerrymandered by joining his "safe" seventh ward to the conservative sixth, where the UNR and other rightist candidates place their hopes. Defferre will be the Gaullists' major opponent in the presidential election in December, and they hope to compromise his chances then by weakening his home-base position in the local elections.

#### Political Realities

The Gaullist maneuvering has not produced the anticipated results; there has been no nationwide cooperation between the SFIO and the PCF. Only in the Paris region has a clear alliance developed, with 14 of the 20 wards and 34 of the 80 outlying districts presenting joint lists, some including other leftists.

By contrast, the bizarre combinations elsewhere in France reflect an even greater inconsistency in local political alliances than commonly occurred in earlier local elections. In Lyon, Mayor Pradel has formed an anti-Gaullist group combining the SFIO, the Christian democratic Popular Republicans

(MRP), and the rightist Independents, the latter including a handful of former Algerie francise advocates. In Marseille, where the Socialists had become accustomed to working with the rightist Independents and the MRP, a small minority of the local SFIO federation was excluded from the party when the group opted for cooperation with the Communists. In Strasbourg and Colmar, some Socialists actually joined forces with the UNR as well as the MRP, arousing consternation in local SFIO and UNR ranks.

#### National Political Disorganization

While these disparate alliances are readily understandable in terms of specific local conditions, they underline the indecision and disorganization of the old-line parties at the national level. Notwithstanding the protracted efforts of the center and the left to form coherent national anti-Gaullist groupings, no viable formations have yet emerged.

A study and coordination committee which for two years has attempted to confederate the MRP, the Radical Socialists, and the Independents on the assumption that such a grouping could work with the Socialists has not yet succeeded. The principal stumbling block has apparently been failure to elicit the prerequisite Socialist "cooperation." While the SFIO, fearing the defection of its militant Marxists, has proved skittish about looking to the right for electoral

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assistance, its efforts to coalesce the left, with or without the Communists, have proved equally unavailing.

The SFIO leadership is still sharply divided on the issue of extending formal relations nationally with the PCF. SFIO leaders are mindful of their past understandings with the Communists, notably the first Popular Front of 1936-37 and the "Big Three" alliance (PCF, SFIO, MRP) of 1945-47; they are wary of trusting the PCF again.

PCF leaders may be disappointed that more alliances with SFIO units have not developed. They had hoped that electoral cooperation with the Socialists would evolve into broader mutual assistance. They saw in it a means of increasing the Communists' already considerable strength in urban centers and a vehicle for emerging from isolation on the national scene. Despite this disappointment, however, the PCF will probably consider the electoral reform a net gain because it has again made PCF-SFIO formal alliances possible.

While the PCF is wooing its "brother Marxists" with some hope of progress, its own internal structure, once so militantly disciplined, shows signs of strain. The normal upset occasioned by Khrushchev's abrupt ouster has been aggravated by the Communist Student Union's continued criticism of party authoritarianism. In an unprecedented move, 100 Commu-

nist university professors sent a letter in mid-February to PCF Secretary General Waldeck Rochet, backing the students' demands for free discussion of ideological problems and implicitly threatening withdrawal of support if their demands were not met. However distasteful such activity may be to party leaders, it could serve their interests in the pre-election period by suggesting a degree of internal democracy that the party has no intention of countenancing.

#### Strength of Old-Line Candidates

In spite of the disarray of the traditional parties, and partly because of the diminished voter concern with ideologies, most of the old-line municipal leaders will probably be returned to their posts in the 14 and 21 March elections. Less restricted by ideological considerations, they have more room for maneuver--to seek the combinations that will get them elected. They are better known, by and large, than the Gaullists, and can base their candidacies on past accomplishments.

#### Implications for Future Political Evolution

By gauging the popularity of the UNR in the local communities, the municipal elections may provide some insight into the political future of France. They will probably make it clear that the party claiming to represent De Gaulle has yet to put down roots in the country. Unless the widely diverse elements

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that make up the UNR can convince De Gaulle and agree among themselves that they must evolve a program through which they can identify with the electorate, prospects for the party's survival are dim once De Gaulle is gone.

In the more immediate future, the results of the municipal elections may prolong the frustration of the UNR with the essentially anti-Gaullist, albeit relatively ineffectual Senate. The municipal councilors, who constitute an important element in the electoral college that votes for the senators, will help choose 84 of the 273 senators up for re-election in September.

#### Effects on Presidential Election

The anticipated poor showing of the UNR will, however, have only limited bearing on the presidential elections next fall. If De Gaulle runs, as he is expected to, he will easily win a new popular mandate since the choice is clearly personal. Only in the unlikely event of a severe economic recession in France or greatly augmented social disturbances would his high popularity be compromised. A public opinion poll conducted in January showed that 60 per-

cent of the electorate were "satisfied" with De Gaulle, thus demonstrating that he could obtain the majority needed to win a presidential race on the first ballot.

Should De Gaulle not run, but personally designate a successor, the Gaullists would still win, but by a considerably narrower margin. The same poll revealed that Premier Pompidou would receive 28 percent of the vote, while his nearest non-Gaullist competitor, Mayor Defferre, would get only 17 percent.

Defferre's candidacy in Marseille nevertheless has a direct bearing on the presidential race. As the only presidential candidate who could pose some challenge, albeit a slight one, to a De Gaulle - appointed successor, he needs every bit of prestige the mayoralty of Marseille can provide him. Should he lose his job this month, there would be no contest at all in the fall, either for De Gaulle or his dauphin. The race in Marseille is expected to be a close one, with slight odds on Defferre retaining his mandate for another term.

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